

## Back to the brewster

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**Back to the Brewster: Craft brewing, gender and the dialectical interplay of re-traditionalisation and innovation**

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**Imprinting patriarchy: Gender and craft work**

The significance of gender within contemporary craft work is frequently acknowledged, but rarely analysed in empirical depth. In this chapter we explore the experiences of women working in the craft brewing industry, paying particular attention to how the recent expansion in craft beer production and consumption is underpinned by a masculinised and patriarchal notion of re-traditionalisation. This is made apparent in the masculinities evident in persistently reproduced structures, aesthetics, marketing and attitudes surrounding craft production in this sector.

Although some of the craft practices discussed in this book are symbolically gendered as female, the dominant cultural image of the skilled artisan/craft-worker remains predominantly male. The persistence of this masculine coding is integral to how craft has intersected with capitalism. In Cynthia Cockburn's (1983) classic study of technological change in the printing industry, *Brothers*, she highlighted the interactions between capitalism and patriarchy in shaping the practice and fate of skilled printers. In traditional printing, a *forme* had to be assembled by hand, with the printer selecting lead-block type from cases, with printers assembling them according to the text but back to front. This required a high degree of literacy combined with an aesthetic sensibility for layout and when to split words. It also required a degree of physical strength to handle the final bound forms, as well as responsibility for maintaining the type. Proficiency in all aspects of this

production process was what enabled the apprentice printer to lay claim to the identity of a master crafter.

Cockburn's historical account of change in the printing industry points to a number of attempts to break this unified practice, with employers taking on women or unskilled men to do parts of the work for lower pay. These moves were resisted by male guild members, and later by male-dominated trade unions, on the basis of the integrity of the craft. Women who had the literacy to work with type were kept from the job because they were positioned as lacking the physical strength to handle the forms. Unskilled men had this strength but lacked the literacy and aesthetic sense to compose print. As such, the job of printer remained a position framed by masculinity and exclusive skill, reinforced through strong collective organization in the London Society of Compositors, whose chapters met in a 'chapel' (usually an upstairs room in a pub, which further excluded many women) and were headed up by the 'father'. Even when new technology was introduced, this patriarchal form of organization, shored up against threat from both women and unskilled men, managed to keep the integrity of the job and control over apprenticeships that would accord skilled status to workers.

In Cockburn's account of printing, craft and skill are patriarchally legitimated achievements, connected to an integrated practice and the attainment of a specific social identity through apprenticeship. Historically, there is a wealth of evidence associating technological innovation in the workplace with deskilling. Division of labour has the potential to break down the integrity of a craft, enabling some work to be carried out by less skilled, and therefore cheaper, workers, such as women. This subdivision also breaks up control over the quasi-patrilineal system of apprenticeship that confers the status of skilled crafter (Braverman 1974; Noble 2011).

Behind this observation lies a broader question about the contingency of skill. As Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of 'situated learning' suggests, the development of competence is not only capability of knowledge and skill, but also the development of a socially legitimated identity, initially through peripheral participation in a community of practice. Claims to skilled status depend on both this recognition by the community of practice, and a wider social status. In most debate

over deskilling and upskilling, the dominant definition of ‘skill’ is in terms of formal qualifications (Edgell 2012), but apprenticeships serve a similar purpose, with a legal-rational entity conferring skilled status on a particular worker (cf. Braverman 1974). Both processes reproduce gendered conceptions of skill that are dependent upon formal recognition by public institutions, rather than passed down within the family, and on more codifiable, technical forms of expertise, which predominate over forms of emotional skill, or practices significant in the domestic sphere. Sewing is a good example of the latter, and one that has had significant implications for the development of the garment industry. A skill that was traditionally passed from mother to daughter in the home, sewing is less commonly deemed to be a skilful practice (Cockburn 1981). This has meant that seamstresses have rarely been able to command the same kinds of salary bonuses for skilled work that male workers have, and automation has proven to be uneconomical, in large part due to the ready availability of very low-paid, mostly female workers (cf. Hammer 2015; Soldatenko 1999)<sup>1</sup>. We take brewing as our empirical site here, because it is so striking how the marketing and communications strategies of craft beer production represent the industry in hyper-masculine terms, connecting meaningful, masculine work to the authenticity of products. This framing of the industry suggests that women entering are clearly moving into a culturally coded ‘man’s world’. The later sections then examine how this positioning is experienced, negotiated and challenged, by women brewers.

### **Gender, marketing, work, and the new craft ‘masters’**

In the USA the 2015 merger of Anheuser-Busch InBev and SAB Miller saw a single brewing conglomerate control 80% of all beer sales in the USA. In parallel, however, between 2007 and 2015, the number of breweries in the USA grew from 398 to over 4,000, and that growth was driven by micro-breweries. The situation in the UK is similar, with rapid growth in micro-breweries,

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<sup>1</sup> This is not necessarily a stable configuration. London’s mainly male Saville Row tailors have long maintained a specific skilled status in making bespoke suits and shirts for men. More recently companies like Hiut Denim have placed the ‘craft master’ status of their employees at the heart of their brand, using craft and the reshoring manufacturing to justify denim jeans with a price tag over £200.

especially in and around London, from just 142 in 1980 to over 1,400 in 2015 (Chapman *et al.* 2017: 1-2). Production by members of the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA), the body representing small and craft breweries, grew by 16% in 2014, at a time when overall alcohol consumption was falling (Smith Maguire *et al.* 2017: 19). Yet small independent brewers are flourishing around the world.

Marketers suggest this is because consumers are tired of mass production and standardised, homogeneous commodities differentiated only by a label or logo. That is the key marketing proposition of the UK based craft beer market leaders BrewDog. In a 2015 ‘welcome’ video on their YouTube site, one of their brewers rolls a bowling ball into ten bottles of Stella Artois.<sup>2</sup> This image captures well the market proposition for craft beer, locating it in a masculine space of nostalgia, blue-collar work, bowling and beer and setting it against a world of large corporations who produce standardised, predictable commodities in order to make money. Anheuser-Busch InBev, the owner of the Stella Artois brand, is the largest brewing company in the world today. Its products are exemplified by Budweiser beer, a pale, innocuous lager targeted at mass markets with the goal of maximising profits. Against this instrumental capitalist logic, craft brewers like BrewDog have positioned themselves as David confronting Goliath: small upstarts motivated by a love of beer, not money, who are not afraid to offend and are out to transform the industry. BrewDog call out to a ‘craft beer proletariat’, heralding a revolution in both production and consumer taste. ‘Craft’ functions as a crucial signifier here, harking back to a pre-industrial, artisanal logic structured around craft as both skilful practice and passionate engagement (Sennett 2008). The promise is of an authentic and distinctive product, created by people who are genuinely ‘passionate about craft beer’, rather than just the corporate bottom line.

Using anachronistic ideals of masculine work to sell beer is not new. Budweiser’s iconic ‘This Bud’s for you’ advertising campaign from the 1980s ‘paraded a collage of blue-collar workers from all walks of life, each of whom practiced his trade with consummate skill and enthusiasm... Bud saluted men who industriously pursued work as an intrinsically satisfying calling, men who applied

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/BrewDogBeer>

their craft skills with good humor and determination' (Holt 2004: 99-100). Holt locates Budweiser's advertising success in their promise to resolve the contemporary crisis of masculinity. Under Reaganite neo-liberalisation, blue-collar workers (mostly men) faced an economic reality of deindustrialization, unemployment and the rise of what they saw as feminized forms of post-industrial work. This reality was in stark contrast to a resurgent ideology of hard work and frontier self-sufficiency in the new enterprise discourse: 'Budweiser targeted this acute tension between the revived American ideals of manhood and the economic realities that made these ideals nearly unattainable for many men' (Holt 2004: 6-7).

If Budweiser's old advertising campaign offers a good example of a specific form of masculine work being used to anchor consumption-based identities, craft beer takes this a step further. Both hark back to an ideology of work far removed from paramount reality and promise to secure identity through consumption. With craft beer, however, authenticity is secured through a knowledge of the provenance of the beer, its ingredients, and a form of conspicuous consumption demarcated not only by premium pricing (craft beers are notably more expensive than either 'premium lagers' or real ales) but by a knowledge of the production process and ingredients, such as being able to distinguish styles of beer, hops, and yeasts. This knowledge is learned through consumption, with the new labour aristocracy of the service sector actively engaging customers in the education of their tastes (Ocejo 2017).

In his 2017 book *The New Craft Masters*, Richard Ocejo reports on ethnographic research into the newly valorised work of high-end barbers, whole-animal butchers, cocktail bartenders, and artisanal, small-batch distillers. Like craft brewing, these professions are increasingly popular with college educated middle-class young men, who just a few years ago would have gone into a white-collar, office-based profession. More than skilled traders, the butchers, barbers and bartenders Ocejo researched also acted as arbiters of taste and culture, combining the embodied skill of craft with expert knowledge of their domain of consumption. As social identity construction has moved more towards consumption, those producers who can not only create valued goods, but also educate the tastes of high-end consumers, can command a social status well above the traditional blue-collar

crafters of decades past. This change of status is founded on the centrality of knowledge in such work, but Ocejó also points to the intrinsic value of skilful practice and craft virtuosity. In an age dominated by immaterial labour and work that can be framed as feminized (cf. Hardt and Negri 2000; Weeks 2014; Huws 2014; Gorz 2010), the masculinized physicality of this kind of craftwork harks back to a golden age in which strength and skill were combined in a unified, knowledgeable, embodied practice that protected patriarchal privilege. As Ocejó puts it, these elite service workers ‘are simultaneously respected knowledge workers and skilled manual laborers, and perform their work in public. Men are thus able to use these jobs to achieve a lost sense of middle-class, heterosexual masculinity in their work’ (2017: 20). By anchoring craft, or artisanal, products in this promise of authentic masculine work, these jobs have become more attractive to young men seeing work, but this conception of craft also anchors the value, and authenticity, of their products in regressive the social structure of patriarchy.

### **Retraditionalisation, masculinity and craftwork**

The combination of community and masculinity in contemporary images of craft and artisanal work in the gentrified spaces of post-industrial consumption thus anchors authenticity on a kind of legislated nostalgia for a sanitized, rose-tinted view of the past (Hatherley 2016). As well as being genuinely committed to a more grounded and ethical form of production, the new crafters are engaged in a kind of ‘retraditionalisation’ (Banks & Milestone 2011; Lash 1994) in which pre-industrial forms of craft are positioned as anchors of both masculine work-identities and community cohesion. As Ocejó (2017) notes, places like barbershops, butchers and bars were focal points for men in urban communities in the past, and retain that role in the contemporary imagination, even if not in reality. Although there are several women working in the butchers and barbers that Ocejó studied, and he does give over some space to considering their experiences, reporting on a female barber’s experiences of learning to give a shave with a straight-razor, but the overall sense is of an archaic set of very traditional values in service. Women and ethnic minorities are largely restricted to back-stage jobs and do not reach the upper echelons where meaningful and long-term careers can

be forged, at least partly because these workplaces are spaces where hegemonic masculinities are performed, which is precisely their appeal to consumers. This observation has already been made in relation to craft beer, and the specific whiteness of the masculinity being performed in that sector. Withers (2017) provides an acute analysis of the cultural and spatial racializing of craft beer consumption. As he argues, the culture of craft beer is not only gendered, but also classed and raced so that 'the craft beer culture is informed and defined by whiteness' and dominated by college educated, white males' (Withers 2017: 237).

This tension is most clearly evident in craft beer marketing, where sexism and misogyny are frequently observed. Objectified women's bodies have long featured in beer advertisements - Budweiser has regularly used images of a doting female pouring a beer for a man, or swimsuit-clad blonde women lying on beach towels. Such objectified images of women appear designed to complement the more active working men, to present a couplet of desired-object and identified-subject. In many images of craft beer, and especially in BrewDog's promotions, a hypermasculine aesthetic of lumberjack shirts and big beards combines with extreme brewing (underwater brewing, very strong beers, or intense tastes like chilli beer) and a celebration of heroic entrepreneurialism (Watt 2016). Women often appear primarily as objects of derision, as in one advert mocking prostitutes, or with products like 'Trashy Blonde', a beer that was promoted with the following on the bottle label:

A titillating, neurotic, peroxide, punk of a pale ale. Combining attitude, style, substance and a little bit of low self esteem for good measure; what would your mother say?

You really should just leave it alone...

...but you just can't get the compulsive malt body and gorgeous dirty blonde colour out of your head. The seductive lure of the sassy passion fruit hop proves too much to resist. All that is even before we get onto the fact that there are no additives preservatives, pasteurization or strings attached.



All wrapped up with the customary BrewDog bite and imaginative twist. This trashy blonde is going to get you into a lot of trouble. (reproduced in Atherton 2011)

Which, as Sophie Atherton (2011) noted shortly after the launch of the beer with remarkable understatement, made her “uncomfortable” because “even in the 21st century women are subjected to – and the subject of – far too much derogatory, degrading and violent treatment, behaviour and attitudes and anything that contributes to that ought to be considered unacceptable.”

This tension surrounding the retraditionalisation evident in contemporary craft work is, in some ways, at the heart of the contemporary craft discourse. Whilst the hyper-masculine imagery of craft that is mobilised by Brewdog appeals to an atavistic ideal of masculinity, ‘craftivism’ politically revalorises traditionally domestic, feminised practices like knitting, crochet and quilting (Corbett 2013; Greer 2014; Rippin & Vacchani this volume). This reframes what was, historically, a form of subsistence self-provisioning, or perhaps small-scale, petty commodity production for relatively localised consumption outside the household, to suggest a model for rethinking work beyond the capitalist, patriarchal employment relationship (cf. Friedmann 1986). Like many other domestic production processes maintained by women, brewing followed a trajectory from localised-craft to industrialised production during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with a massive increase in scale and formal employment in dedicated production sites outside the home. In the process domestic production was rebranded as a masculine hobby - ‘home brewing’<sup>3</sup> - and the gender of brewing completed its shift from a highly skilled female-dominated profession in the 1300s, to a male dominated, industrialised, deskilled form of mass production (Bennett 1996; Peyton 2013).

Industrialisation brought profitability and efficiency, but at the cost of standardisation and

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that in the USA home-brewing was only made legal again, after prohibition, by the 1978 Home Brew Act, which some commentators have suggested led to a boom in home-brewing that created the conditions of possibility for the subsequent emergence of the craft-beer scene, and the rapid growth in micro-breweries across the USA since the 1980s (Chapman et al. 2017: 6). In many accounts of craft brewing, and in our own research, home-brewing is regularly cited as the starting point for craft brewers, with hobby becoming later recognized by friends and family, who encourage the brewer to upscale and professionalise (Chapman et al. 2017; Maciel 2017).

oligopoly, reaching its apogee in the 1970s when the UK market was dominated by just a handful of large breweries, and relatively homogeneous, pale lagers had started their rise to eventually dominate the market (Brown 2010). Industrialisation thus combined a patriarchal and capitalist form of organising brewing, with standardised production for mass markets.

Whilst aspects of this mass production/consumption model had been problematised since the early 1970s by the CAMpaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) in the UK, small scale brewing remained a male dominated sphere, both in the production and consumption of real ales using traditional methods, such as cask conditioning (Thurnell-Read 2016). Whilst CAMRA has been relatively successful in putting the politics of production back into the pub and pump, it is first and foremost a consumer group and concerned with the authenticity of the product rather than production per se (Watson & Watson 2012). Craft beer, in contrast, mobilises the form of the labour process - 'craft' - as the core of the brand.

### **(Re)Introducing brewsters**

If brewing shifted from a female profession in the 1300s, to male-dominated, industrial mass-production by the 1970s, how do women working in the industry today fare, and how is the rise of craft brewing and retraditionalisation shaping women's experiences? Whilst Ocejo presents little data on women, he does hypothesise that 'women have greater representation in [...] niche occupations than in their mainstream versions' (2017: 19). The lived experiences of women in these new craft industries, however, has so far largely been neglected. In his landmark study of craft brewers in the UK, Thomas Thurnell-Read (2014) included just one female respondent: 'One of a growing number of 'brewsters' in the British brewery industry... Jane reflects how in spite of the male dominance of the brewery and pub industry she has confidence that her beers can 'speak for themselves' in acting as a clear and tangible demonstration of her skills and competence' (Thurnell-Read 2014: 52). Despite this, Jane clearly recognised that 'the main target for drinking beer is man' (*ibid.*). This tells us little about the gender dynamics of the sector, or the experience of working in it.

Brewing and alcohol consumption are peculiar contemporary cultures. The masculinity of drinking cultures means that women entering a profession such as brewing are expected to establish their legitimacy in a 'man's world' in a way that men never have to. As Ocejó notes:

Women in these new, elite, manual labor jobs... experience threats to their pursuit of a professional identity in these male-dominated, masculine-coded jobs in spite of the lessened role emotional labour plays in them. These threats specifically come from male consumers who sometimes question their expertise. (Ocejó 2017: 20)

Our analysis below suggests a great deal more ambiguity than Ocejó's passing comments suggest. Craft brewing has opened up a somewhat paradoxical space for innovation in product, process and identity, that is distinct from both industrialised mass production, and the more traditional, male dominated, CAMRA scene. By challenging both tradition and mass-industrialisation, the ultimately empty signifier of 'craft' in beer and brewing has created room for more diversity, with spaces for women to position themselves as doing something different. However, there is also clearly a continuation of sexism, misogyny, and exclusion on the basis of sex or gender.

### **Exploring the experiences of brewsters I: Women in a man's world?**

We began exploring the expanding world of craft brewing through gendered marketing materials such as those described above. Our intention was to gather data from brewers to gain insight into why they were representing their beers in ways that could be interpreted as sexist or misogynist. Our attempts to gain access to companies like BrewDog were consistently unsuccessful over an extended period of time. During this process, we realised that there is a significant minority of women brewing in this sector, supported by networks such as the US-based but globally active Pink Boots Society. We therefore began to collect data from women working in the sector. In total, we conducted 17 interviews, with 15 women and two men (both men were partners and collaborators of the women being interviewed) in Europe and North America.

The interviews were semi-structured, to provide a high level of flexibility during the interaction. We chose this approach because the women worked in a range of positions: co-owner, head brewer, brewer, assistant brewer, marketing, and brewpub manager. Our intention was to gain a sense of how and why the women had chosen to work in a male-dominated masculine environment, whether they were experiencing change over time in the industry, and what they predicted as the future of craft brewing. Our analysis here focuses on representing those experiences as transparently as possible, within the analytical frame we have developed from the dataset. The following sections examine the concerning experiences of women working in the craft brewing industry, as well as covering their interpretations of how authenticity in craft brewing is anchored through a displaced homo-social fraternity as well as ‘craft’ skill.

### ***Harrasment and discrimination***

Despite innovation being used creatively to open up a space in the male dominated brewing industry – which will be discussed later - discrimination remained an issue for our respondents. Interestingly, the predominant structure of the interviews began with an assertion that gender and sex discrimination was not an issue for them personally: that their beers spoke for themselves; and that quality would out, regardless of who the brewer was. Even though we recruited a significant proportion of brewsters through the generosity of a known feminist network, such associations did not generally personally resonate with the respondents. However, the interview narratives are striking in that initial disclaimers were often followed by a litany of discrimination or harassment. Indeed, a comment that ‘I have never really had like any sexist comments to me...’ segued into :

Actually I kind of had one today... this guy [from a company she applied for a job to]... Wrote me a message, he goes, “Hey hot stuff, are you still interested in applying?...”

This was followed by two further recollections of recent events of harassment:

... when we were hanging out [at a beer festival] he was kind of, I don't know, he was a little bit drunk and he was kind of poking me on my shoulders and on my sides...

...at the brewery, we were just finishing up bottling and he kind of... I just feel someone slap my [body] and I literally popped up and I go, "what the fuck?" and I just looked at him and I was in such shock, and I just looked at [male colleague] and he didn't say anything and I just walked away, and I wish I had said something right there and then.

As we write this chapter, the revelations of sexual harassment of women in the Hollywood film industry are still making headline news, and being reinforced with reports from other sectors. One of our respondents, who worked in marketing for a brewery, had previously been in the music industry and drew parallels with similar experiences of harassment at pop concerts and award ceremonies. Common to both was male domination at the highest levels of the industry and the presence of alcohol:

I guess in industries where there's drinking involved... I did myself, had to handle some unpleasant situations when there was actually a work-related event. But, we had a few drinks and stuff, and all of a sudden it wasn't a professional context anymore.

In brewing, of course, alcohol is a constant part of the business. Brewers and other employees reported regularly visiting pubs where their beer was sold, either to check how it was being kept, or to further sales. In such a context, normal expectations of 'professional' conduct would often slide, as women engaged with sales reps (who had perhaps been drinking themselves) and with customers, who had almost certainly been drinking. Indeed, one of the key aspects of this industry is that much of the networking and 'social work' associated with a successful career straddles the boundary between work and leisure, and often involves intoxication, further eroding the self-regulation of behaviour that characterises formal workplaces. As several of the breweries we visited

also had tap-rooms, where punters came to the brewery to drink, often excessively, on-site, even the brewery shop-floor was not entirely separated from spaces of intoxication and excess, making inappropriate, sexualised behaviour even more likely than more in clearly delineated workplaces.

### ***Work/life (im)balance***

Physical sexual harassment was the most direct and obvious form of discrimination reported by our respondents, but there are two other indirect forms of discrimination that were presented as significant. Both of these are built into the practices of brewing, structured into the workplace. The first indirect form of discrimination concerns the boundary between work and life, as described above. The overlap between work and leisure in the drinks business seems to have fostered an environment in which men hitting on women was fairly regular. The second example concerns the more conventional understanding of work and life as they pertain to domestic and familial responsibilities outside the workplace. It is well established that women continue to bear the primary responsibility for domestic and care work in the home, especially if children are involved. Even where work-family friendly policies are in place, these are rarely taken advantage of by men; simultaneously they can hinder women's career progression significantly if taken up as an option (Hochschild 1997). Brewing is not a very well-paid profession, especially working in London, where many craft breweries are based and where rents and the cost of living are some of the highest in the world. Despite this, working hours are long and often irregular. This had a significant impact on women who also had caring responsibilities outside work. As one brewster told us:

we brew from five o'clock in the morning to like, 12 o'clock at night, sometimes 1am. So, there are some, you know, sacrifices that have to be made... and on the weekends... I don't like to put women in a box and say: women are caretakers... But if a person has children, I don't know a lot of brewers who have children. And if they do, they have a partner who's doing a lot of the caretaking.

Central to this was the inflexibility of the brewing process itself. Fermentation times vary with temperature and ingredients; in a craft brewery this is especially likely to be less predictable and standardised than in a larger, industrial producer. Similarly, a larger brewery might be able to employ shift patterns of work to cope with the inflexibility of the brewing process, whilst still having regular working hours. For smaller breweries, however:

...the raw materials are in charge... I thought I was going to be home at a certain time, and it wasn't. We had to stick it out and, you know, baby sit our beer and make sure that it was okay.

The use of the term 'baby sit' is telling here. For the women we spoke to, working as a brewer was difficult to imagine if they wanted a family, or even a social life. This work-life balance only became harder to achieve as brewers became more established, moving on to head-brewer and managing a team. As one head brewer, told us:

[My partner] said, you never were brought up to think that you deserved to have a big job, and you're feeling guilty about this work-life balance thing. Like if your dishes aren't done, then you're a bad woman. But you could be running an organisation and still, if your dishes aren't done, then you're, kind of, not a good enough person.

She was only able to do the job because her partner took on much of the domestic work involved in maintaining a household. For women in a more traditional relationship, where they had primary responsibility for domestic labour and childcare, this arguably would not be possible. In summary, then, the materiality of the brewing process, with its inherent unpredictability, resulting from the process of fermentation and its dependence on yeast as a crucial non-human actant in production, combined with the wider gendered division of domestic labour, to suggest to women that this was a problematic profession – even those being successful within it.

### *Gendered norms and chivalric sexism*

Our final example of discrimination also derives from the conjunction of the materiality of brewing and gendered norms. As in Cynthia Cockburn's study of printers, the technology of brewing, and the unit sizes, tend to assume a large fully able-bodied person willing to be pushed physically. In order to lay claim to craftiness, the person is expected to accomplish all aspects of a craft, from the routine, mundane and dirty, to the more technical and conventionally skilful. This mastery of a complete skill set is crucial to becoming a crafter (Cockburn 1983; Sennett 2008). In brewing, the size of the vessels, the weight of raw materials and barrels, and the nature of the work involved in making beer, often seem to presuppose a very strong body of a size and shape more commonly found in men than women. As with printing, it is quite possible to find solutions, such as hoists and pulleys, that would enable a wider range of bodies to perform the task, but the norm was clearly established as large, male and fully able bodied. To give just one example, one head brewer in a small business told us the following story:

We were taking a delivery... okay, we, I was taking in a delivery of nine pallets on my own. And... and the driver was being such an arse. He... he wouldn't help me in any way, like... like move any of these pallets. So I had to push nine tons' worth of goods into the warehouse... And you know one of those things where it's like physically too much for you; that was the only time I was just like: 'oh, my God'.

This was presented as a gendered experience; other brewers emphasised that no-one should be expected to do work in this way, nor was it necessary given the technology and machinery available. This kind of experience did not prevent respondents from doing the job, but it suggest to them that they would find it more difficult than an average man to lay claim to full craft skill and status. Echoing Cockburn's (1983) findings, one head brewer told us:



I think there would've been more opportunity, and it's nothing to do with sexism or anything like that. It's more of the production manual work. I think there's more opportunities for men to get stuck into beer, to be, to do a, you know, a good operator's role, really learn the plant and then move up that way... Whereas women are limited physically or don't choose to do that work. I think possibly it was a bit limited from the start... lifting, dirty work, you know. But dirty work can progress through to, you know, learning some good skills and progressing.

Whilst the account of unloading a truck suggests that the driver is an 'arse' for not helping out, the idea that doing the full range of work is necessary to be secure in the craft meant that men trying to help could also be a problem. One brewer, now well established, discussed this as a particular problem when she was just getting started in the business.

...there was... a huge hurdle of getting over everybody's instinctual chivalry, which wasn't allowing me to do my job. There was never a problem about it, but I would go: 'Okay, I'll lift that,' and they'd be like: 'No, are you sure? I'll lift it.' And I'd be like: 'yes, I'm really sure. I'm here to work.'... fortunately, up in Yorkshire they have a... thread of farmers' wives, so there was an archetype there for me to sort of grab onto.

This kind of indirect discrimination, which we might tentatively call chivalric sexism, has some resonances with other highly gendered working contexts. In Spradley & Mann's (1975) *Cocktail Waitress*, they note that whilst many men would sexually harass and grope the waitresses, there was often one man in a group who would tell the waiting staff to speak to him if any of his friends got out of line. Whilst this may be well intentioned, the result is to further disempower the women, who are expected to call upon a man to help them do a job that is being made intolerable and unpleasant by other men in the group. It reinforces the sense that women can be positioned as out of place in a man's world, and always dependent upon men. In brewing, this dynamic placed women brewers in a bind as they were trying to establish equality in a profession where the

materiality of the brewing process was itself structured around a specific set of masculine norms. Offers of help both reaffirmed the normality of a man doing the job, and prevented women laying claim to the complete accomplishment of task that is required for becoming respected within the craft community.

## **Exploring the experiences of brewsters II: Reformulating tradition?**

Whilst the above analysis paints a bleak picture of the experiences of the brewsters we interviewed, the overall message had a more hopeful flavour. If anything, experiences of harassment and discrimination were spoken of with more of a dull resignation – of practices and mindsets stuck in a bygone era that could be acknowledged, named and challenged – rather than something that should get in the way of future potentialities. Each interviewee was keen to discuss the more proactive part that they played within their ‘scene’; the gradual erosion of gendered norms, expectations and stereotypes; and the innovative opportunities for women to participate in the industry that they are historically responsible for.

Indeed, ‘it is almost certain that the earliest brewers were women, because food and drink preparation was their domain’ (Peyton 2013: 15; Darwin 2017: 223). Historical research shows that this tradition continued until relatively recently, with frontier homesteaders in the Westward expansion of the United States still coding brewing as women’s work. This provides the resources for respondents such as Jane in Thurnell-Read’s (2013) study of micro-brewers to challenge men’s domination of brewing by reviving the traditional term ‘brewster’, which harks back to a pre-industrial age when brewing was predominantly women’s work (Bennett 1996).

Our respondents noted this, and their part in reviving the term to enable the construction of a historically legitimate social identity:

back in the day, brewers were women. Like, women were the first brewers. [in an article I wrote I mentioned a female brewer and said] she’s a brewster. The old term for brewer. And apparently, it got changed to brewer.

...

I think brewster has been out of use in British English for a long time. Like, there has not brewsters around for the last 100 years, you know, it's been a long time. So, obviously, brewer is going to become the norm for people to say... at the moment there are more male brewers than there are female brewers, but the female brewers are just as good as the male brewers, and they're recognised for that.

Direct references back to a bygone era were relatively rare, however, and more likely to be indirect. One respondent referred to the Yorkshire 'thread of farmers' wives', which provided 'an archetype there for me to sort of grab onto' when establishing her position in a Yorkshire based brewery, early in her career.

These appeals back to a pre-industrial logic of domestic, petty-commodity production offered a means of legitimating women as brewers, and clearly resonate with the pre-industrial idea of 'craft' and artisanal production as being somehow more authentic and grounded (Friedmann 1986).

However many of our respondents preferred to emphasise discourses of innovation, experimentation and novelty to locate themselves in the industry. Women brewers, in this account, were less conservative and more likely to take risks and innovate. Their aesthetic sensibilities and taste (sometimes linking to their experiences of cooking or baking) enabled them to challenge the conventional, industrial beers and real ales, by creating new tastes and styles, with the intent of shaking up what they experienced as a sclerotic and hide-bound industry. For example, one brewer had twice been brought into quite traditional breweries to rejuvenate their product lines. Both breweries had well established positions in the local area for their real ales but felt that they were missing out on the rapid growth in the craft beer market and the changing tastes of consumers, who were turning to more heavily hopped beers, with a higher ABV:

I met with the marketing last summer... and they did want new beer styles. And it's nothing new to most of the beer world, craft beer, but they haven't done IPAs... those kind of styles. So we've got

[product name] that's just come out, which is just more adventurous with the hops, and our sourcing of different hops is tricky, but some different hops and different methods of hopping as well, which they haven't done.

Dry hopping or the use of 'hop rockets' (a contemporary flavour infusing system) were radical innovations in a very traditional brewery. Whilst it upset the male brewers who had been working there for a while, the owners had brought a woman in to explicitly disrupt those traditions and reinvigorate the product range to appeal to changing tastes and market demographics<sup>4</sup>. This idea that women wished to be seen as more innovative and creative brewers was consistent across our interviews. For example, one well established brewer noted that her brewery had a reputation for 'having a go at lots of different creative... and taking... an existing style and putting a twist on it... we never do anything that fits very well in a box'. Indeed, her desire for breaking with convention meant that the brewery, whilst commercially successful, often failed to qualify for awards because their beers failed to fit into the usual categories within which beers are judged and prizes awarded (cf. Wright 2014). This idea that women are more creative, and that men brew boring beers or 'brown liquids', was referred to in a third interview in which two female brewers were discussing their practice together and how it was received by male colleagues:

*Respondent 1:* ...a definite and consistent trend that is the women who are doing interesting things... [most English breweries are] doing the old fashioned styles and English tweedy brown beers, and then you just, you know, flounce in with your poncy American art.

*Respondent 2:* For me, I was a scientist before I did this, so for me, different sort of, you know, chemistry and new hops, flavours, I find it so exciting. You know, and I think he should... He doesn't. He just hates it. If I dry hop, well, it's like the end of the world.

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<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps ironic that a hop related innovation should be something that opens the gate for women to re-enter the brewing industry. As Judith Bennett (1996) notes in her history of women in brewing from 1300 to 1600, the shift from unhopped *ales*, to hopped *beers*, was central to the shift of brewing from women to men (1996: 11).

*Respondent 1:* Imagine if beer smelled of something other than mould?

As this conversation suggests, the female brewers we interviewed present themselves as more creative than their male counterparts and less bound in ‘traditional’ modes of production. They were prepared to experiment and shake up the established practices in their industry. ‘Craft’ thus became a signifier that was future orientated for them, suggesting change and disruption, rather than a nostalgic harking back to the good old days before industrialization, as we might expect from a practice anchored in the discourse of craft (Land & Taylor 2014). Where post-Braverman labour process theory would suggest that innovation and change are often bywords for deskilling and the degradation of craft, these female craft brewers understood their practices as both a continuation of pre-industrial craft traditions and as a contemporary, innovative practice. Although there were significant differences between the physical set ups in the breweries, even relatively small breweries used new techniques, ingredients and technologies. In the larger breweries, the production process itself was technologically controlled and cutting-edge technologies enabled nitrogen, rather than carbon dioxide, to be used to give beer a fizz. Fully automated canning lines enabled large scale production for retail, as well as for bar sales.

However, there was no sense that contemporary technology was inimical to ‘craft’ production, or that it implied deskilling. If anything, it extended the range of craft skill, effectively upskilling the work of the brewers by demanding technological and scientific knowledge to use and maintain this equipment. Nor did it suggest a replacement of bodily senses, as the brewers spoke of the continued importance of embodied taste and smell in the production of beer, with brewers regularly sampling beer throughout its production, and tasting or smelling raw materials during the process. The real target when respondents discussed ‘traditional’ production was the established industrial forms of brewing, dominated by a fairly standardised set of beers, brewed using established technologies and ingredients, in a relatively standardised labour process dominated by men.

**Women, men, craft brewing: New world, old rules**

From this, we would suggest that women in the contemporary craft brewing industry are still treated as ‘women in a man’s world’. Structural, cultural and social change during the Industrial Revolution and subsequently have encouraged the brewing and drinking of beer to be understood as a predominantly male activity, removing the female brewsters who brewed beer in the home and developed brewing processes over thousands of years (Bennett 1996). The materiality of the production process, both through units of design and in the unpredictability and temporality of yeast-based fermentation, intersects with a wider gendered division of domestic labour and bodily norms, to encourage us to think of women the exception, rather than the norm, in brewing – and by extension, in craft work. Add to this forms of direct sexism and even sexual harassment, possibly exacerbated by inebriation, craft brewing seems to be a very unwelcoming working world for women.

However, as we have also seen, the shifts in drinking cultures that craft beer has brought with it, alongside moves towards experimentation and innovation in brewing, have at least partially broken down the gendering of brewing, beers, and drinking, pointing to new opportunities for women to participate in the industry that they are responsible for historically. These two dynamics pull in different directions, and are still playing out in the craft brewing industry, but we expect that the progressive elements of craft, at least in craft brewing, hold out promise of greater equality and diversity, rather than leading towards a regressive, patriarchal retraditionalisation. The women we spoke to, whilst very clearly a minority still in the industry, enjoyed their work, position, status, and beer, and provide intriguing evidence of changing drinking cultures as opening up the future to greater gender equality.

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